

Arabian (Dromedary) Camel ***Camelus dromedarius***

Classification

Related to the Bactrian camel (*Camelus bactrianus*), and the two can actually mate and produce viable hybrids, though they are thought to be sterile.

Class: Mammalia

Order: Artiodactyla

Family: Camelidae

Genus: *Camelus*

Species: *dromedarius*

Distribution

The Arabian camel range is in Africa, notably the Sahara Desert, and the Middle East. There is a feral population in Australia.

Habitat

Deserts characterized by long dry seasons and short rainy season.

Physical Description

- Arabian camels have a head-body length of about ten feet (3 meters).
- They weigh 1,000-1,450 pounds (450-650 kg). Males are larger than females.
- They have short fur ranging in color from beige to dark brown, with slightly lighter undersides.
- They have a single hump on the back.
- They have a small head with short, pointed ears and thick eyelashes.
- Their long, slender legs have calluses on the "knees" where they touch the ground when the camel is lying down.

Diet

What Does It Eat?

In the wild: The camel is an herbivore eating thorny plants, dry grasses and salty vegetation.

At the zoo: Hay and grain plus vitamin and mineral supplements

What Eats It?

There are no known predators of the Arabian camel.

Social Organization

Arabian camels form groups of two to 20 individuals consisting of one dominant male, several adult females plus sub-adults and young. The dominant male of the family will protect the females from stray males, and also directs the family from the rear when moving with the females who take turns leading.

Life Cycle

Female camels are sexually mature at three to four years and males at five to six years. Mating occurs during the rutting season which is during the wet months at the beginning of the year. After a gestation of about 15 months, females give birth to a single calf weighing about 80 pounds (37 kg). The calf's eyes are open at birth and its body is covered with a thick woolly coat. Calves can run when they are only a few hours old. The calf nurses for up to 18 months. Life span is about 40 years in the wild and up to 50 years in captivity.

Adaptations

One Hump or Two?

Arabian (dromedary) camels have a single hump – like the letter "D". The hump is used to store fat not water. The fat can be converted to energy when needed. The Bactrian camel has two humps – like the letter "B".

"Ships of the Desert"

Camels are called "Ships of the Desert" because they are uniquely adapted to survive the harsh conditions of the desert habitat. They have large flat feet with leathery pads and two toes on each foot. When the camel places its foot on the ground the pads spread out preventing the foot from sinking into the sand. Their eyes are protected by a double row of long curly eyelashes that help keep sand and dust out of their eyes. They have a third eyelid which acts like a windshield wiper to

wash sand out of their eyes. Thick bushy eyebrows shield the eyes from the desert sun. Their ears are lined with fur to keep sand from blowing into the ear canal. Even their nostrils close to keep out the sand.

Big Gulp

Camels can drink up to 35 gallons of water in ten minutes! During the hottest time of the year, camels can survive for over a week without water and during cooler weather they can go as long as six months without drinking. To keep moisture in their body, camels don't sweat much and they can raise their body temperature by as much as eleven degrees during the heat of the day.

Conservation Connection

IUCN Status: none, but this species has been considered "extinct" in the wild for the past 2,000 years.

Arabian (dromedary) camels have been semi-domesticated for thousands of years and are not endangered.

Fun Facts

- 90% of the world's camels are Arabian (dromedary) camels.
- Camels are used as beasts of burden but they also provide 11-17 pounds of wool and up to 1056 pints of milk per year. Camel milk is used to make butter and different kinds of cheese.
- Camels have a cleft in their upper lip to catch moisture from the nostrils.
- Camel hair is used to make clothing and tents for desert nomads.
- Camels can go 3 days (and sometimes longer!) without water.

